

## Sermon 8<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Father, take my words and speak through them, so that each of us may hear your call today and be ready to follow wherever you lead. Amen

One of the very popular TV programmes in the last couple of years has been The Masked Singer. For those of you who haven't watched it, it is a programme where celebrities disguise themselves in costumes and masks and then sing – a panel try to guess who they are from their voice and the clues that they are given. At the end of each show one celebrity reveals who they really are to shouts of take it off take it off take it off as they remove their mask. The winner is obviously the last one to be unmasked and this year no one had correctly guessed who Panda really was!

Our gospel reading today has a similar feel about it as the Jews are asking Jesus how long he will keep them in suspense and when he will reveal whether or not he is the Messiah.

Jesus tells them that he has already told them who he is but they don't believe him, because they cannot identify his voice and are not his sheep.

In contrast, those who do know who he is, who have identified his voice, follow him and in exchange he promises them eternal life and even the assurance that no-one will ever snatch them out of his or his Father's hand because his father has given them to him – they are chosen and Jesus is their shepherd, and as he has told us earlier in John 10, he calls his sheep by name and he lays down his life for them.

But who are these sheep? Well they are all of us who believe he is the Messiah and all who have been signed with the sign of the cross in baptism and claimed by Christ as his own. Jesus is saying that he knows us, that he has chosen us, that he laid down his life for us, that he promises us eternal life and that no-one will ever be able to snatch us from his hand. Now that is Easter joy.

But how do we recognise the voice of Jesus?

When my dad was in his last year at primary school, his teachers always knew when he was talking, even when they had their backs to him or he was in the midst of a crowd which he found very frustrating – why did they know it was him? Because they recognised his voice as he was the only one in the school whose voice had broken!

I don't know about you, but sometimes I find it difficult to hear and recognise the voice of Jesus but have learnt that hearing the voice of Jesus isn't necessarily hearing an audible voice but learning to recognise His voice in many and varied ways. If we look at the Easter story, we can see some of the ways in which Jesus spoke to his first disciples and this can help us to recognise ways in which he might speak to us.

At the foot of the cross, the centurion recognised Jesus as the son of God as he breathed his last – we too may hear Jesus in the silence.

In the garden on Easter morning – Mary heard him when she looked into his eyes and heard him saying her name. We too may hear Jesus when we read icons or look at pictures and hear Jesus calling our name, as a friend of mine did recently when looking at Holman Hunts picture 'The Light of The World' realising that Jesus was waiting for her to open the door of her heart to him.

On the road to Emmaus the two travellers recognised him when he broke bread after he had walked and talked with them on the road. We can hear Jesus at the communion table as we eat bread and drink wine in his presence

In the upper room, Thomas recognised him when he saw his wounds and touched them, knowing him to be his wounded saviour. We can hear Jesus when we too are hurting and find comfort in the touch of another, or when our heart breaks when we see the suffering of others.

On the sea of Galilee, the disciples in the boat recognised him through the wonders of nature when their nets filled with fish. God can speak to us through the order and beauty of creation as we marvel at God's handiwork.

On the beach, Peter responded to Jesus' call as he ate breakfast with him and then as they walked together and he recognised that he was forgiven, renewed and restored. We can hear the voice of Jesus as we share meals and spend time with family and friends and they support, encourage and challenge us.

On the road to Damascus, as we heard last week, Saul recognised him in the blinding light. Do we hear God when the unexpected or dramatic happens in our own lives?

And in our Acts reading today, we see that the widows recognised him in the work of Tabatha, a woman who sewed for Jesus and who cared for the most vulnerable in her society. We can hear His voice as we are ministered to by others in practical ways or as we use our gifts to care for others.

All these ordinary people heard and recognised Jesus, and their response was to follow him and to share the Easter joy with others.

- The centurion declared truly this was the son of God probably risking his position and standing in society
- Mary ran to tell the others saying, I have seen the Lord
- The disciples on the road ran all the way back to Jerusalem to tell everyone what they had experienced
- Thomas proclaimed who Jesus was to him and went on to carry the gospel message to the East.
- The disciples went and ate breakfast and then, continued to tell others all that they had seen.
- Peter committed his life to following Jesus, founded the Church and allowed God's spirit to work miracles through him.
- Saul became a great preacher and teacher and built up the church
- And the widows made others go and get Peter, recognising that Tabatha's time had not yet come – God hadn't finished with her.

So, what about us. What should be our response when we recognise the voice of Jesus?

The fourth Sunday of Easter, today, every year is designated as vocations Sunday, a Sunday when we are all encouraged to respond to his call by giving ourselves again to God, offering all of our god-given gifts to be used by Him in sharing the good news that we are chosen, we are saved, and that nothing will snatch us from his hand. And having given ourselves to him, we then need to spend time listen attentively for what God is saying to each one of us and to see if he is leading us into something new this Easter season.

11 years ago, I did just that. I had no job, my house was on the market, I'd sold my car and I felt as if I was on God's scrap heap. As I walked to church, that vocation Sunday morning, I remember saying to God I am wholly available to you. I can go wherever you want me to go and do whatever you want me to do, and gently over the past 11 years God has led me, through some green pastures and some dark valleys, and I have heard his voice through other people, through nature, through music, through preaching, through pictures, through children, through the bible, through making cups of tea and through the Eucharist... By listening to his voice and following him he has enabled me to recognise that I am chosen and not on the scrap heap, that he isn't finished with me yet. He has shown me that all I need to do is bring myself, and my God-given gifts and skills which incidentally are not in sewing, and place them in his hands, being prepared to follow even when I am unsure of the way, knowing that he will be with me and will never let any power of hell or scheme of man snatch me from his hand.

So I believe God's challenge to us all this vocations Sunday morning as we stand in the middle of the Easter season, is to offer ourselves, just as we are, to him again and then to go out from here and listen for his voice in the remaining weeks of the Easter season so that when we hear him say to each one of us again on Ascension day, 'Go to people everywhere and make them my disciples knowing I will be with you always until the end of time' we are ready to respond

'Saviour, we hear your call, help us to follow'

Amen